A Matter of Strategic Focus

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WE STAND TODAY at the trail- - head that leads to the twenty- -first century. The world ahead appears to be full of promise and opportunity—and it is. The United States is engaged around the world with market economies that are open, growing, and flourishing. An exponential growth in technology is enhancing our lives and enabling us to master the art of international engagement. Things have never looked better. Or have they?

At the close of World War II, we were the lone superpower in the world. We possessed an edge in technology that made us militarily without peer. The power in the world, both military and economic, had been recently and greatly redistributed—the equation overwhelmingly shifted in our favor. Gone were the colonial empires and the hegemons that briefly succeeded them. We were the only nation capable of winning a war anywhere on the planet.

But we also saw the revival of old struggles, as embedded hatreds and inherited competitions, once muzzled but now released, renewed their course of violence and instability. Power vacuums were filled by expansionist states. With the export of communism, much of the developing world fell into revolution. In many cases, oppression was overthrown, only to be replaced by new forms of oppression.

For a time, however, America was free to challenge or ignore these circumstances as it chose. Without a clear and imminent threat, we felt safe in concentrating on domestic issues. We felt safe in lessening our financial commitment to defense. The world was our oyster, and our focus was on consumption.

In many ways, our situation today mirrors the one in which we found ourselves after World War II. As we were then, we are now—the sole superpower, dominant in the world marketplace, militarily without peer—the only nation capable of winning a war anywhere on the planet. Just as we did then, we now face important decisions concerning the defense structure with which we will maintain our place in the world and ensure our continued security. In 1945, with no clear threat, we felt safe in setting aside a significant amount of our military capability in order to use the money elsewhere. Today, we again have difficulty discerning our threats and once again ponder the nation's needs with respect to military forces.

But in the decade after World War II, we came to learn that much in the world required our use of force. We learned it the hard way. When we committed a hollow force to the Korean peninsula, not only did we pay an inordinately high price in blood but also we almost lost before we could get

started. We learned then, as perhaps we are learning now, that one clear victory—in war or in cold war—cannot protect our worldwide interests or relieve us of our responsibility of vigilance against the dark forces of this world.

This comparative analysis necessarily leads us to the question of our day: how should we build and maintain our national security posture for the twenty--first century? The answer lies in the expectations we have of our forces and of the use of those forces. To define these expectations, we must answer three questions: Why will we fight? Where will we fight? Whom will we fight?

Why Will We Fight?

Our national security strategy spells out the answer to the first question for us. Generally, American military forces will "support U.S. diplomacy in responding to key dangers—those posed by weapons of mass destruction, regional aggression and threats to the stability of states." More specifically, "there are three basic categories of national interests which can merit the use of our armed forces. The first involves America's vital interests . . . [those of] overriding importance to the survival, security and vitality of our national entity—the defense of U.S. territory, citizens, allies and our economic well--being. . . . The second category includes cases in which important, but not vital, U.S. interests are threatened. That is, the interests at stake do not affect our national survival, but they do affect importantly our national well--being and the character of the world in which we live." Finally, "the third category involves primarily humanitarian interests. Here, our decisions focus on the resources we can bring to bear by using unique capabilities of our military rather than on the combat power of military force."[1]

Where Will We Fight?

Where we will fight, of course, is not spelled out for us. For obvious reasons, no one can predict where America's interests will be threatened. Through careful analysis, however, we can attempt to anticipate the circumstances most likely to require our use of force—or forces. In our efforts to be prepared, we can increase our understanding of what the world will be like in the approaching century so that we can build a force to deal with the dangers of that world. Certain dynamics taking place today are restructuring the world. Such changes are largely economic and demographic in nature. Together, these two factors are altering the geopolitical landscape of the world to which we have committed ourselves through our strategy of "engagement and enlargement." We must take note of this restructuring if we are to be prepared for our role in the world that will result. We must adjust the way we look at the globe.

During the course of our history as a nation, we have tended to have a very Eurocentric view. Our principal markets have been in Europe, and our vital interests included ensuring that western Europe remained free and engaged with us in the global marketplace. Although that remains true today, other vital interests are growing in proportion. The peoples and markets of the Asia--Pacific/ Indian Ocean littorals are rapidly becoming the economic determinants of the world's future. China and India are emerging as powers with wealth that will change the face of the global economy. Both have burgeoning high--technology industries and a seemingly limitless pool of inexpensive labor. A number of countries on the Pacific Rim—China, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore—all have projected economic growth rates far in excess of the European industrialized nations we traditionally have associated with global economic strength. The World Bank forecasts that by the year 2020, 80 percent of the world's leading

economies are expected to be in the Asia--Pacific region. From America's perspective, the focus of the world economy is shifting from the community of nations across the Atlantic to the community of nations bordering the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Demographics is the other great factor in determining the nature of the twenty--first--century geopolitical landscape. By the year 2010, 58 percent of the world's population will hail from the Asia--Pacific/Indian Ocean region. Not even the widespread starvation and poverty experienced prior to the "green revolution" or the great Chinese famine of the 1960s could stop what has become an exponential population explosion throughout the region. Perhaps more alarming than the numbers, however, is the composition. Over 71 percent of this population in the 2010 time frame will be between the ages of 15 and 64. This age group contains the traditional war fighters—the war starters.

As if intense concentration of people of military age did not present enough challenges (or opportunities, depending on one's perspective) for the governments of the region, a quickening trend toward urbanization is under way. By 2010 over 40 cities in this region will have populations in excess of seven million people. Many of these cities, despite a growing per--capita income, are not keeping up with infrastructure development. Water, power, sanitation, medical services, road grids, and transportation systems are all becoming overburdened—all this at the same time that communications, particularly international television, are becoming almost universally available to all. People living in urban squalor can clearly see the greener grass. This is not a recipe for contentment.

If the regional players (state actors and nonstate actors alike) become embroiled in crises, we will likely find urbanized terrain our future battlescape. As future antagonists increasingly imbed themselves in cities, we will need forces with capabilities commensurate to the tasks of urban warfare.

So how does this examination of the economic and demographic trends of the region apply to the potential use of US forces? The answer lies in the actions of the regional players and in an examination of the impact of those actions on the interests of the United States of America.

Given their newfound wealth, the need to secure their access to resources, and fears based on numerous regional and ethnic hatreds and mistrusts, many of these nations are increasingly opting for escalating investments in military power. And weaponry is readily available. High--technology weaponry and the very latest in sophisticated hardware—even weapons of mass destruction—are all available to countries who desire them. We face the potential for a possibly explosive regional arms race. Many of the actions of the regional players are based on a common denominator—a competition for scarce resources. No example is more telling than the regional dependence on Southwest Asian oil, the vital enabler that fuels and sustains continued growth.

Our own national interests may very well be attached to those of the resource--dependent Asia--Pacific markets that fuel our own economy. Ensuring the free and equitable flow of those resources is arguably already in our interest; most assuredly, the importance of this issue will only increase with time.

The "where" we most likely will have to fight (or commit our forces) tomorrow is being determined today by the economic and demographic forces of the world—particularly by those in the Asia--Pacific/Indian Ocean region.

Whom Will We Fight?

Clearly, the traditional major regional contingencies we face today have the potential of lingering for a while. Over time, others may replace them. Increasingly, however, we see the threats to our interests springing

not from direct challenges from another nation--state but from a disintegration of traditional state actors or from challenges to those actors by nonstate actors. Since the breakup of the bipolar world, we have been reminded over and over again that the earth is literally seething with ethnic, religious, and tribal hatreds and suspicions. The growing Asia--Pacific/ Indian Ocean marketplace is no exception. We can anticipate that crises will occur. We can anticipate that we will have interests affected by these crises.

But threats to our interests are developing a new dimension. Whereas crises generally develop between easily recognizable and structured power bases such as state actors, we are beginning to see the development of chaos throughout the world. There is a distinction between crisis and chaos. Chaos, a by--product of uncertainty, involves unstructured power and ultimately casts aside the traditional ways in which antagonists deal with each other and deal with the population at large. Somalia and Rwanda, as well as the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and the genocide of Kampuchea, all provide examples of chaotic scenarios. In these chaotic scenarios, we must be prepared to counter an enemy who is unlikely to take on our strengths but who would seize upon the opportunity to attack us asymmetrically. We must expect that many of our potential enemies were paying attention during the Gulf War and have learned appropriate lessons. These adversaries, so enlightened, are unlikely to take us on—toe--to--toe and strength--to--strength. Our dependence on ports and airfields, our dependence on information systems, and our doctrine of massed forces and massed logistics all present targets of opportunity to the asymmetrically thinking opponent, armed with even a limited supply of technologically sophisticated weaponry.

What Will We Need?

The answers to the three questions of why, where, and whom we will fight brings us to a fourth question: what do we really need in order to be prepared? The answer lies in a force of capabilities appropriate to the anticipated threat. We need to procure, structure, and train a force of utility—not only against armor formations and other forms of conventional military power but also against the fomenters of crisis and chaos. We will always have a need for precision strike. We will always need a heavy land army to be the mailed fist of American will. As a maritime nation, dependent on the seas for commerce and to serve as the interconnecting highways for our engagement, we certainly will need a robust sea--control force as well. Although the need for all these capabilities will remain as we progress into the next century, there is an escalating need for a greater ratio of forces that can engage with the ill--defined and asymmetric threats of tomorrow's crises and chaos. Smart munitions have limited utility, and information dominance becomes an unrealistic expectation in situations of urbanized littoral chaos.

Our challenge lies in ensuring that the military we build is capable of providing options. We must be able to project a credible forward presence—one that is able to increase or decrease visibility as required. We will need a force that can deploy to a region without reliance on extensive, land--based infrastructure. Our capabilities must include the ability to operate in the cities of tomorrow and deal with several missions from opposite ends of the spectrum simultaneously in the same operation—and they must provide options other than just overwhelming or precision firepower. The force we build must operate in environments where the dangers from asymmet-

ric threat are high. Ultimately, the force that yields the most utility is one that provides an adjustable rheostat of capabilities to the National Command Authorities—one that can shift from forward presence to humanitarian assistance, noncombatant evacuation operations, peacekeeping, forcible entry, and sustained combat operations.

The world is changing. So too are the threats that bode for possible US commitment of forces. The truth is, business as usual may not provide the capabilities we need to deal with the realities of the coming world. If we are to provide for the defense needs of this nation in the twenty--first century, we must be honest about what we see ahead. Having looked ahead, we must step off on the trail that truly leads to a prosperous and secure future for our great nation. □

Note

1. William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, February 1996), 18.